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Assassination Questions

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During the violent 1960s, assassins gunned down President John F. Kennedy, his brother Robert and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Again in 1972, a gunman shot Alabama's Gov. George Wallace, putting him in a wheelchair for life.

The shootings have raised questions that cannot be dispelled. Millions of Americans simply aren't satisfied with the official verdicts.

Now Sen. Richard Schweiker (R-Pa.), has produced circumstantial evidence that President Kennedy may have been murdered in retaliation for attempts on Cuban Premier Fidel Castro's life. The senator has submitted his findings to the Senate Intelligence Committee for further investigation.

Coretta King, widow of the martyred civil rights leader, suspects that her husband also was the victim of a conspiracy. She has asked the Congressional Black Caucus to help reopen the investigation.

But in the backrooms of Congress, there is a strange reluctance to inquire too deeply into the Kennedy and King assassinations. From the day President Kennedy was struck down in Dallas, the federal authorities have seemed more intent upon reassuring the public than investigating the murder.

The late J. Edgar Hoover indicated that higher authorities wanted the FBI to "convince the public" that Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, killed Kennedy.

On Nov. 26, 1963, less than a week after the assassination, Hoover noted that the FBI's investigative report was supposed "to settle the dust, insofar as Oswald and his activities are concerned, both from the standpoint that he is the man who assassinated the President, and relative to Oswald himself and his activities and background."

The Warren Commission, headed by the late, respected Chief Justice Earl Warren, was appointed to review and assess the Kennedy assassination. As part of its investigation, the commission specifically requested information on political assassination attempts in other countries. Yet the Central Intelligence Agency, incredibly, failed to mention that its operatives had been trying to knock off Castro.

On Sept. 7, 1963, the angry Castro told Associated Press that he knew about the attempts and warned that two could play the same game. Later in the month, Oswald turned up in Mexico City where he visited both the Cuban and Soviet consulates. It is known that he spoke to a Soviet KGB agent.

A Mexican informant, named Sylva Duran, later informed the U.S. embassy that she saw Oswald inside the Cuban consulate on Sept. 28. She said she overheard the Cubans talk to Oswald about assassinating someone and saw them pass money to Oswald.

President Kennedy was murdered on Nov. 22. The next day, CIA chief John McCone informed the new President, Lyndon Johnson, about Oswald's activities in Mexico City. The astonishing account of the Mexican informant was subsequently reported to the President. It was a story, however, that she repudiated under questioning by Mexican police.

But years afterward, President Johnson told intimates he was convinced that the CIA's attempts on Castro's life had backfired and that Castro was behind the Kennedy assassination.

Nevertheless, no federal agency has bothered to review the evidence and reconsider the Warren Commission's verdict. Sen. Schweiker's investigation merely raised more questions. The senator told us it would take at least 50 investigators, with the power to subpoena witnesses and take sworn testimony, to pin down the facts.

He has passed the buck to the Senate Intelligence Committee, which has the

jurisdiction. Chairman Daniel Inouye (D-Hawaii), assured us that he didn't intend to let Schweiker's report "gather dust." But he said the committee had other priorities that would occupy it for the rest of the year.

On the House side, two unheralded congressmen, Thomas Downing (D-Va.), and Henry Gonzales (D-Texas), are pressing for a full investigation of political assassinations. Downing wants to concentrate on the John F. Kennedy murder. Gonzales would widen the probe to include the other assassinations. And the Black Caucus will also insist upon investigating the shooting of Dr. King.

Downing and Gonzales must go past the powerful House Rules Committee before they can get authorization for a special investigation. Chairman Ray Madden (D-Ind.), told us the authorization won't get past his committee this year.

He could be overruled by House Speaker Carl Albert (D-Okl.), who privately favors an investigation. But Albert, who is retiring, isn't expected to take any action.

So like the Senate, the House will probably put off any investigation of the assassinations until next year.